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IN THE

SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES.

OCTOBER TERM, 1967.

No. 471

T. B. PEELER and MRS. T. B. PEELER,
Petitioners,

v.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,
Respondent.

PETITION FOR A WRIT OF CERTIORARI

To the United States Circuit Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit.

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ST. LOUIS LAW PRINTING CO., INC., 411-15 N. Eighth St., 63101. CEntral 1-4477.

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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,
Respondent.

PETITION FOR A WRIT OF CERTIORARI

To the United States Circuit Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit.

Petitioner Prays that a writ of certiorari issue to review the judgment of the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit, entered in the above entitled case on May 11, 1967.

OPINIONS BELOW.

The opinion of the District Court (R. 34) is reported at 238 F. Supp. 640. The opinion of the Court of Appeals in this case (R. 44) is printed in Appendix B hereto, p. 17. The opinion of the Court of Appeals in a compan-

ion case, reference to the opinion of which is material to a full understanding of the Circuit Court's opinion in this case, is Case Number 22,693 of the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals, **Wood v. United States,** decided May 11, 1967 (R. 49), printed in Appendix B hereto, beginning at page 21.

JURISDICTION.

The judgment of the Court of Appeals was entered on May 11, 1967 (Appendix B, p. 17, infra). The jurisdiction of this court is invoked under 28 USC, Sec. 1254 (1).

QUESTIONS PRESENTED.

Whether the proceeds received under an agreement for the removal of crushed stone constitute proceeds from the sale of all of a mineral in place, thus being proceeds from the sale of a capital asset; or whether taxpayer retained an economic interest in the minerals so as to render such proceeds "royalties", and taxable as ordinary income.

STATUTES INVOLVED.

Internal Revenue Code of 1954—

Section 61,
Section 611, and
Section 1221.

Each of these statutes is printed in the Appendix A hereto, beginning at p. 13.

STATEMENT.

Taxpayers, husband and wife, filed a joint return for the years 1957, 1958, and 1959, reporting the proceeds from an arrangement with Weston & Brooker Company, a stone quarrying company, as gain from the sale of a capital asset. The Internal Revenue Service determined that the taxpayers had erroneously reported such receipts on the basis that the proceeds were royalties and as such should be taxed as ordinary income. A deficiency was accordingly assessed for these years.

Taxpayers paid these deficiencies, filed timely claims for refund which were disallowed, and in due course, filed suit under Title 28, USCA, Sec. 1346 (a) (1), in the District Court for the Middle District of Georgia.

Based upon the pleadings and an affidavit of taxpayer, T. B. Peeler, the Petitioners filed a motion for Summary Judgment on the ground that there was no genuine issue as to any material fact and that they were entitled to judgment. To this the Government filed a cross-motion for Summary Judgment on the grounds that there was no dispute as to a material fact and based on such undisputed facts, the Government was entitled to a judgment as a matter of law.

Taxpayer petitioner owned a tract of 219 acres of land in Jones County, Georgia. The Weston & Brooker Company of Columbia, South Carolina, wished to prospect for stone on this tract of land to determine if there was a sufficient deposit to justify its carrying on a mining and quarrying operation.

Accordingly, on May 5, 1955, an agreement (R. 26) was entered into between the taxpayer and the mining company with regard to the purchase of stone. This agreement had a two-fold purpose. First, to give the company

the right to prospect for stone, and secondly, if stone was found, the right to purchase the stone at a price designated in the agreement. The agreement referred to the parties as "Lessor" and "Lessee", and the purchase price was referred to as "royalties". The arrangement under this agreement was to last for twenty years. "Royalties" were to be 3¢ per ton of 2000£ and 2¢ per ton of 2000£ sand shipped.

After making a determination that there was a sufficient stone deposit to conduct a mining operation, an officer of the mining company approached the taxpayer and expressed a desire to obtain an amendment to the original agreement so as to convert the twenty-year agreement into an agreement extending for an indefinite period beyond the original twenty-year agreement, so that there would be sufficient time to remove the entire deposit of stone. Such an amendment was made (R. 31).

The mining company, thereupon, entered the premises, stripped the over-burden from said land of some fifteen to twenty-five feet in depth, and removed all standing trees, timber and vegetation so as to be able to quarry the stone on said property.

There is upon the property a pit from which stone has been removed to a depth of 110 feet and extending over fifty to sixty acres. The company intends to mine the entire stone deposit, which according to their estimate covers the entire 219 acres to a depth of 600 feet. It is noted that at the present rate of extraction, it will take the mining company more than 150 years to complete this operation. Therefore, in the end, all that will be left for the taxpayer's heirs is a useless hole 600 feet deep extending over 219 acres.

The company considers this a permanent operation and it is estimated that the mine operator has expended the

sum of $1,750,000 in the purchase and installation of quarrying and mining machinery and equipment.

Payments to the taxpayer are made monthly on the quantity of crushed stone shipped from the quarry.

The District Court found that the taxpayer, in fact, if not in form, sold the entire mineral deposit to Western & Brooker, that the taxpayer retained no economic interest in such deposit, and that the proceeds from the transaction are entitled to capital gain treatment.

Accordingly, the District Court granted the taxpayer's motion for Summary Judgment and denied the motion filed by the Government.

On appeal by the Government, the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit reversed the judgment of the District Court, basing its reasoning primarily on that expressed the same day in the opinion rendered by it in **Wood v. United States**, No. 22693 (19 AFTR 2d 1435).

REASONS FOR GRANTING THE WRIT.

I. The decision of the United States Court of Appeals in the instant case and in **Wood v. United States** (Appendix B infra), the authority upon which the instant case was decided, are directly in conflict with the decision of the First Circuit Court of Appeals in **Linehan v. Commissioner**, 297 F. 2d 276.

The Circuit Court, in the instant case, attempted to draw a factual distinction between the **Wood** case, supra, and **Linehan**. Such a distinction is invalid.

Such a distinction is invalid particularly with reference to the instant case, Peeler. By trying to distinguish the **Linehan** case from the Wood case, the Circuit Court draws out certain facts which indeed make Linehan indistin-

guishable from Peeler, e. g., "In Linehan the gravel company was obligated to remove all of the sand and gravel down to a specific grade", **Wood**, supra (Appendix B, infra).

In the instant case the miner, due to local law, was under an implied obligation to mine the stone, presumably to exhaustion, under the prevailing Georgia Law (**Hodges v. Ga. Kaolin Co.**, 108 Ga. App. 111).

In addition to the implied obligation under law, the conduct of the petitioner and the mining company indicates that all the mineral is to be removed.

A survey was made which indicated that the rock went to a depth of 600 feet over the entire 219 acres.

The parties re-negotiated the original agreement so that the miner would be certain that he would have sufficient time to remove the entire mineral deposit.

The miner moved onto the property extensive and expensive mining machinery and equipment, took complete charge of the entire tract, and gave every evidence that he intended to make a permanent installation.

The agreement pertained to only certain types of minerals and specific excluded others (R. 30).

The agreement related to a specifically defined 219 acre area and the mineral deposit according to the best information available was located on the entire area to a depth of 600 feet.

The mine operator cut the timber and stripped the overburden upon a substantial portion of the tract and began an operation which has been in effect for approximately ten years.

Upon completion of the mining operation, all that will be left is a dangerously large hole.

The Fifth Circuit Court itself, in **Wood** in Footnote 22 (Appendix B, p. 36), acknowledges that it is in conflict with the decision of the First Circuit in Linehan:

> "This is not to imply that presented with the factual situation before the court in Linehan, we would reach the same result."

The conflict is clearly shown by the fact that Peeler is so factually close to **Linehan** as to be indistinguishable and the Fifth Circuit has, in light of the similarity, held that Peeler retained an economic interest in the minerals contrary to the decision that would have been rendered in the First Circuit.

Furthermore, the Fifth Circuit cites **Laudenslager v. Commissioner** (2 Cir.), 1962, 305 F. 2d 686, as supporting their decision in the **Wood** case, supra, and Laudenslager and Linehan are acknowledged to be in irreconcible conflict with each other (**Turner v. U. S.**, 226 F. Supp. 970; **Laudenslager**, supra, footnote 4, p. 692).

The similarity of the obligation to mine in **Linehan** and **Peeler** puts a flavor on the facts in the **Peeler** case different from the **Wood** case, so that the rule regarding "economic interest" in **Barker v. Commissioner**, 2 Cir. 1957, 252 F. 2d 195 and **Gowans v. Commissioner**, 9 Cir., 246 F. 2d 448, should be applied to the facts in Peeler. In addition, the Peeler case is factually similar to the Tax Court case of **Robert M. Dann**, 30 T. C. 499, which conflicts with the Wood decision.

Also, the undisputed facts in the case at hand show, as the District Court below found, that in fact, if not in form, the taxpayer sold the entire mineral deposit (R. 37).

II. The Court of Appeals has decided an important question of federal tax law which the Supreme Court of the United States has not previously passed upon, but which should be decided by this Court.

A. The Supreme Court has previously passed upon the definition of an "economic interest" in oil and gas cases for purposes of determining entitlement to depletion allowance **but has never ruled** upon the question of "the sale of all minerals in place" or "the retention of an economic interest" insofar as the same applies to cases involving hard minerals. (**Burnet v. Harmel**, 1932, 287 U. S. 103, 53 S. Ct. 74, 77 L. Ed. 199 (relates to oil and gas)).

B. The Circuit Courts have created confusion for the taxpayer in determining how transactions relating to the sale of hard minerals must be reported for federal income tax purposes.

The Court will take notice that in the affairs of men it is perilous to a buyer's financial position for such buyer to purchase for a lump sum all of a given mineral substance to be found on a specific tract of land. It does not change the character of a sale when the price for the mineral has to be determined by measure to be taken after the agreement has been made as in **Crowell Land & Min. Corp. v. C. I. R.**, 242 F. 2d 864.

The question always to be determined in these cases is whether the owner has retained an economic interest in the deposits. (**Laudenslager**, supra.)

While the words used by the parties in designating their relationship cannot be ignored, it is well established that we must look to the substance of the transaction to determine the essential character. (**Linehan**, supra; **Albritton v. C. I. R.**, 248 F. 2d 49 (5 Cir.).)

The Circuit Court has glossed over the facts and circumstances appearing in the record of the **Peeler** case and simply relegated the parties to the labels by which they call themselves. There are ample facts in the District Court record to justify and even compel a ruling that

the parties in fact, if not in form, intended a sale of all of the mineral in place (R. 37).

The Circuit Court states in its opinion in the Peeler case (R. 44) in commenting on **Hodges v. Georgia Kaolin Co.**, supra, that such decision by the Georgia Court merely "requires a miner who has cut timber and removed over-burden to make a reasonable effort to render the mining operation profitable . . ."

A careful reading of the case will surely indicate that the holding of the Court is best set forth in headnote (1) of the opinion:

> "(b) Where the lessee notifies the lessor to remove the timber from the land and then proceeds **itself** to remove the over-burden on a substantial portion thereof, the obligation immediately arises on its part under the provisions of the lease to **proceed with reasonable diligence in a mining operation**" (Emphasis supplied).

Indeed, a further quotation from the **Hodges** case, supra; in the Georgia Courts' decision on Motion for Rehearing, seems to bear out this Petitioner's interpretation of the impact of **Hodges** upon the question here under consideration:

> ". . . He (lessee) simply insists that the lessee, having notice of its intention to begin the mining and having taken steps in preparing the land for mining, which the lease provides may be done for that purpose, and thus having rendered a substantial portion of his land unfit for other purposes; may not thereafter sit idly by and allow the land to remain undeveloped or unmined."

Further, the contract in the Hodges case, supra, by its terms also provided for voluntary termination as did the contract in the Peeler case.

CONCLUSION.

For the reasons stated herein the Petition for Writ of Certiorari should be granted.

Respectfully submitted,

.....

J. RENE HAWKINS,
Counsel for Petitioners.

APPENDIX A.

Statutes:

Internal Revenue Code of 1954—

Sec. 61 (26 U. S. C. A. 61) . . .

"Sec. 61. **Gross income defined.**

"(a) **General definition.**—Except as otherwise provided in this subtitle, gross income means all income from whatever source derived, including (but not limited to) the following items:

(1) Compensation for services, including fees, commissions, and similar items;

(2) Gross income derived from business;

(3) Gains derived from dealings in property;

(4) Interest;

(5) Rents;

(6) Royalties;

(7) Dividends;

(8) Alimony and separate maintenance payments;

(9) Annuities;

(10) Income from life insurance and endowment contracts;

(11) Pensions;

(12) Income from discharge of indebtedness;

(13) Distributive share of partnership gross income;

(14) Income in respect of a decedent; and

(15) Income from an interest in an estate or trust."

Sec. 611 (26 U. S. C. A. 611), . . .

"Sec. 611. **Allowance of deduction for depletion.**

"(a) **General rule.**—In the case of mines, oil and gas wells, other natural deposits, and timber, there shall be allowed as a deduction in computing taxable income a reasonable allowance for depletion and for depreciation of improvements, according to the peculiar conditions in each case; such reasonable allowance in all cases to be made under regulations prescribed by the Secretary or his delegate. For purposes of this part, the term 'mines' includes deposits of waste or residue, the extraction of ores or minerals from which is treated as mining under section 613 (c). In any case in which it is ascertained as a result of operations or of development work that the recoverable units are greater or less than the prior estimate thereof, then such prior estimate (but not the basis for depletion) shall be revised and the allowance under this section for subsequent taxable years shall be based on such revised estimate.

"(b) **Special rules.**—

(1) **Leases.**—In the case of a lease, the deduction under this section shall be equitably apportioned between the lessor and lessee.

(2) **Life tenant and remainderman.**—In the case of property held by one person for life with remainder to another person, the deduction under this section shall be computed as if the life tenant were the absolute owner of the property and shall be allowed to the life tenant.

(3) **Property held in trust.**—In the case of property held in trust, the deduction under this section shall be apportioned between the income beneficiaries and the trustee in accordance with

the pertinent provisions of the instrument creating the trust, or, in the absence of such provisions, on the basis of the trust income allocable to each.

(4) **Property held by estate.**—In the case of an estate, the deduction under this section shall be apportioned between the estate and the heirs, legatees, and devisees on the basis of the income of the estate allocable to each."

Sec. 1221 (26 U. S. C. A. 1221) . . .

"Sec. 1221. **Capital asset defined.**

"For purposes of this subtitle, the term 'capital asset' means property held by the taxpayer (whether or not connected with his trade or business), but does not include—

(1) stock in trade of the taxpayer or other property of a kind which would properly be included in the inventory of the taxpayer if on hand at the close of the taxable year, or property held by the taxpayer primarily for sale to customers in the ordinary course of his trade or business;

(2) property, used in his trade or business, of a character which is subject to the allowance for depreciation provided in section 167, or real property used in his trade or business;

(3) a copyright, a literary, musical, or artistic composition, or similar property, held by—

(A) a taxpayer whose personal efforts created such property, or

(B) a taxpayer in whose hands the basis of such property is determined, for the pur-

pose of determining gain from a sale or exchange, in whole or in part by reference to the basis of such property in the hands of the person whose personal efforts created such property;

(4) accounts or notes receivable acquired in the ordinary course of trade or business for services rendered or from the sale of property described in paragraph (1); or

(5) an obligation of the United States or any of its possessions, or of a State or Territory, or any political subdivision thereof, or of the District of Columbia, issued on or after March 1, 1941, on a discount basis and payable without interest at a fixed maturity date not exceeding one year from the date of issue. August 16, 1954, 9:45 a. m., E. D. T., c. 736, 68A Stat. 321."

APPENDIX B.

United States Court of Appeals
for the Fifth Circuit.

October Term, 1966.

No. 22584.

D. C. Docket No. 1963-Civil Action.

United States of America,
Appellant,

vs.

T. B. Peeler and Mrs. T. B. Peeler,
Appellees.

Appeal from the United States District Court for the Middle District of Georgia.

Before Rives, Bell and Thornberry, Circuit Judges.

Judgment.

This cause came on to be heard on the transcript of the record from the United States District Court for the Middle District of Georgia, and was argued by counsel;

On Consideration Whereof, It is now here ordered and adjudged by this Court that the judgment of the said District Court in this cause be, and the same is hereby, reversed with instructions to the said District Court to enter judgment in accordance with the opinion of this Court.

May 11, 1967.

Issued as Mandate: June 5, 1967.

In the United States Court of Appeals
for the Fifth Circuit.

No. 22584.

United States of America,
Appellant,

versus

T. B. Peeler and Mrs. T. B. Peeler,
Appellees.

Appeal From the United States District Court for the Middle District of Georgia.

(May 11, 1967.)

Before Rives, Bell and Thornberry,, Circuit Judges.

Per Curiam: Taxpayer Peeler owns a 219-acre tract of land in Jones County, Georgia.[1] The Weston & Brooker Company wished to prospect on this tract of land to determine whether exploitation of any possible stone and sand deposits would be profitable. Accordingly, on May 5, 1955, a lease agreement was entered into between taxpayer and Weston & Brooker whereby the latter was given the right to prospect on taxpayer's land for a period of six months. The agreement also provided that if after this period, Weston & Brooker wished to mine, the contract could be kept in force for twenty years by the payment of a yearly minimum royalty and a specified royalty per ton of mineral removed. On April 9, 1956, the parties entered into a supplemental

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[1] Mrs. Peeler is a party to this litigation merely because joint tax returns were filed. She played no active part in any of the business transactions relevant to the resolution of this controversy.

agreement which incorporated the original lease agreement and extended it for an indefinite period of time so long as its terms and conditions were met. Pursuant to these agreements, Weston & Brooker entered into extensive mining operations on taxpayer's land.

The amounts paid to taxpayer under the terms of the combined agreement were reported by him as long term capital gains in his income tax returns for the years 1957, 1958, and 1959. In each year the Commissioner determined that the payments should not be accorded capital gains treatment, but should be taxed as ordinary income subject to a five-percent depletion allowance. The additional taxes were in each year assessed and collected. Within the time allowed by law, taxpayer filed a claim for refund. When this claim was disallowed, the present litigation ensued.

Both parties filed motions for summary judgment with the district court, alleging that there was no material issue of fact and that they were entitled to judgment as a matter of law. The district court found that taxpayer in fact, if not in form, sold the entire mineral deposit to Weston & Brooker and had retained no economic interest in the mineral deposits. Accordingly, the court granted the taxpayer's motion for summary judgment and denied that of the government. *Peeler v. United States*, M. D. Ga. 1964, 238 F. Supp. 640.

We agree with the district court's determination that there was no material issue of fact and that summary adjudication was therefore proper. We hold, however, that the court erroneously applied the law in holding for the taxpayer.[2] Our rationale in reaching this deter-

[2] The district court in its opinion discussed two primary factors upon which its determination was grounded. The court, of course, was faced with the task of applying *Crowell Land & Mining Corp. v. Commissioner*, 5th Cir. 1957, 242 F. 2d 864, and *Albritton v. Commissioner*, 5th Cir. 1957, 248 F. 2d 49. In its view, the dis-

mination is set forth in *Wood v. United States,* 5th Cir. 1967, ... F. 2d ..., decided this day, and will not be reiterated here. It is sufficient to say that after a careful review of the record and arguments presented in the present controversy, we are convinced that taxpayer retained an economic interest in the minerals in place and that the income derived from their extraction was properly taxed as ordinary income. We therefore Reverse with instructions to the lower court to enter judgment accordingly.

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tinguishing factor between the two cases was the fact that in *Crowell* compensation to the landowner was measured by a fixed price per unit of mineral removed, while in *Albritton* compensation was based upon a percentage of the sales price of the extracted mineral. As discussed at length in the *Wood* case, *infra,* we do not view this as the distinguishing factor between the two cases. ... F. 2d at ..., note 26; neither do we consider a fixed-price-per-unit measure of payment incompatible with the retention of an economic interest. ... F. 2d at ....

The other primary factor upon which the district court's opinion was grounded was its belief that Georgia law created an implied obligation on the part of Weston & Brooker to extract *all* of the minerals once it had removed the trees and overburden from taxpayer's land. The Georgia case relied upon, however, *Hodges v. Georgia Kaolin Co.,* 1963, 108 Ga. App. 115, 132 S. E. 2d 86, does not set forth that proposition. In our minds the *Hodges* case at most requires a miner who has cut timber and removed overburden to make a reasonable effort to render the mining operation profitable:

> It may well be that when the lessee engages in an exploratory operation it will be discovered that there is no [mineral] . . . to be mined from the land, or that it can not be done in quantities sufficient to make it a profitable operation, in which event we think that the lessee's duty to mine will have been exhausted. The fact that those operations may render the land without value for farming would not give rise to any cause of action, for that is a risk that the lessor took when he entered into the lease agreement. But if the lessee causes the timber to be cut and the overburden to be removed and stops there without doing more, we think it has gone beyond the authority of the lease and has stopped short of its obligation thereunder.

Id. at ..., 132 S. E. 2d at 88. It should also be noted that the agreement in the instant case contained a provision allowing voluntary termination by either party. Such an explicit contractual provision clearly negates any covenant generally implied by the law which is to the contrary.

In the
United States Court of Appeals
for the Fifth Circuit.

No. 22,693.

Nathaniel C. Wood and Gertrude L. Wood,
Appellants,

versus

United States of America,
Appellee.

Appeal From the United States District Court for the Northern District of Texas.

(May 11, 1967.)

Before Rives, Bell and Thornberry, Circuit Judges.

Thornberry, Circuit Judge: This appeal presents a question of proper tax treatment of compensation received under a contract permitting removal of sand and gravel from appellant taxpayer's land. Taxpayer argues that the contract was in essence a sale of the minerals in place and that payment received should be taxed as long-term capital gains. The government argues that the contract constituted a mineral lease and that the payments received are taxable as ordinary income subject to a five per cent depletion allowance. The district court held for the government. We affirm.

Mr. and Mrs. Wood own 14,088 acres of land in Crosby County, Texas. Since the date of purchase in 1950, Mr. Wood has used the land for ranching.[1] Shortly after

[1] Mrs. Wood is a party to this litigation merely because a joint tax return was filed. She has played no active part in any of the business transactions relevant to the resolution of this controversy.

purchasing the land Mr. Wood entered into a five-year contract with Chancey-Dickey Materials Company for the purpose of exploiting deposits of sand and gravel known to exist on the ranch. As the date for expiration of this contractual agreement neared, Noble W. Prentice and his associates,[2] being in the sand and gravel business, approached Mr. Wood in an effort to reach some agreement whereby Prentice could exploit the sand and gravel deposits.

Negotiations between Woods and Prentice resulted in a contractual agreement, entitled Sand, Gravel and Rock Lease, whereby Wood did "grant, lease, and let" to Prentice the exclusive right to mine sand, gravel and rock on his ranch for an indefinite period.[3] Pursuant

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[2] Hereinafter referred to as "Prentice."

[3] The contract between taxpayer and Prentice provided:

The parties hereto mutually agree, as follows:

(1) Second Party [lessee] may place upon said premises any and all machinery, equipment, structures, roads, railroad and such other things which may be necessary or convenient for use in mining, processing, loading and transporting sand, gravel and rock, and for such other operations as may be incident to the drilling, exploration, mining, processing and removing of such materials. Second Party after the termination of this lease, for whatsoever cause, is hereby expressly granted a reasonable time within which to remove such property and objects so placed upon said premises by it, not to exceed ninety (90) days, and agrees to give peaceable possession at the end of that time. Any and all such property and objects placed upon the premises shall remain personalty and shall never be considered part of the realty as by attachment to the soil.

(2) Second Party may build dams to impound water necessary to the proper washing of sand and gravel, or drill water wells, or excavate existing springs (with the permission of Clark Wood as to existing springs) or seepage water or dig pits in the river bottom or adjacent thereto to secure water, and lay all necessary water lines, construct power lines for pumping or plant operation and do all other things reasonable and necessary on the land to secure efficient and economical production.

(3) This lease and rights granted herein shall endure and run from the 1st day of October, 1955 and thereafter according to the terms of the next paragraph, and Second Party shall be given a reasonable time after notice, to perform any of the actual or im-

to the agreement, Prentice moved upon the taxpayer's land and commenced operations. In 1958, 1959, and 1960

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plied covenants, conditions or stipulations during the term of this lease.

(4) First Party agrees to protect the Second Party in the peaceful possession of the premises here let, for the purpose of mining, processing and removing sand, gravel and rock only, for so long as sand, gravel and rock is produced from said land and the First Party receives a minimum of $15,000.00 per year from royalty from sales of sand, gravel and rock and/or supplemental payment by Second Party to produce said annual minimum if royalty payments above are insufficient to meet said annual minimum royalty guarantee. Second Party agrees to pay First Party on October 1, 1955 an advance royalty payment of the same amount he received for the month of October of 1954, and the same amount for each month thereafter as he received the prior year until Second Party begins production and sales to be recovered by Second Party out of royalty becoming due to First Party until recouped.

(5) In the event of a national emergency or calamity, such as severe depression where sales are reduced, or war, during which time production and sale of construction materials are controlled, or greatly reduced and it is not possible for Second Party to sell materials profitably or in quantities sufficient to meet the minimum royalty guarantee, Second Party may give First Party written notice of ninety days (90 days) that Second Party cannot continue to comply with the minimum guarantee and be relieved from the running of said minimum under this contract for the duration of said emergency or calamity period.

(6) Second Party agrees to save whole and hold harmless First Party from any liability which may result from the acts or omissions of Second Party, his employees or agents resulting from anything Second Party may do on the subject premises or as a result of this lease agreement.

(7) Second Party agrees to build and maintain and keep cleaned out, cattleguards at any point where it's [sic] necessary roads may cross fence lines. Where First Party needs roads across Second Party's roads, then Second Party will keep barrow ditches at said crossing filled up to road crossing level so First Party may cross in any motor vehicle.

(8) Second Party agrees to consult with First Party before changing pit locations or move plant location or do other things which might withdraw or destroy more land for First Party's use and enjoyment.

(9) Second Party agrees to hard surface its haul road from the plant to the exit gate from the ranch toward Slaton, and Second Party agrees to replace to Lessor or to Lessee holding said lease at the date of this lease, if either furnishes to the Texas Highway Department or the Counties of Crosby and/or Lubbock gravel to

Wood received as consideration under the agreement the respective sums of $85,078.32; $140,426.72, and $114,006.72 which, less annual allowances for depletion of five per

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hard surface the road from Slaton east to the entrance to said ranch without charge, or such portion thereof as is furnished free.

(10) Second Party agrees to operate upon said premises in an orderly and workmanlike manner, and shall disturb First Party and his tenants as little as reasonably possible in their normal use of said land for farming and grazing.

(11) Nothing in this contract shall be construed as an oil and gas lease, and First Party expressly retains the right to lease said premises, or any part thereof, for oil and gas, but it is expressly agreed and understood that the rights created in any lessee in such oil and gas lease, shall be subject to all the rights and privileges created in Second Party herein, under the terms of this agreement.

(12) Second Party, in consideration of the rights herein granted by First Party, agrees and obligates himself to pay to First Party, as hereinafter stated, a royalty on each and every cubic yard of sand, gravel and rock mined on and removed from the premises, which royalty shall be twenty-five cents (25¢) per cubic yard.

(13) Royalty payments shall be based on truck measurements at destination or if shipped by railroad, railroad weights to govern and yardage shall be computed on a basis of 2800 lbs. per cubic yard. All material processed shall remain the property of Second Party until removed from premises, and Second Party reserves the right to remove such processed materials after termination of this lease by payment of the cubic yard royalty herein set forth, and the right of ingress and egress to remove said processed materials.

(14) Second Party by these presents obligates itself to keep a full, true, and accurate record of all sand, gravel, and rock mined and removed from said premises, and agrees that said First Party shall have free access to such records during all business hours, and based upon such records, said Second Party obligates himself to mail to Clark Wood before the 15th day of each month at Slaton, Texas, a statement showing the quantity of material removed from premises during the preceding calendar month, which statement shall be accompanied by the amount due as hereinabove provided.

(15) This lease and all its terms, conditions and stipulations shall extend to and be binding on all successors, heirs and assigns of said First Party or Second Party. Second Party must secure written agreement of Clark Wood before any sale or assignment of this lease is consummated, but it is specifically agreed that this reservation is made to Clark Wood, only, and that in the event he sells the ranch the Second Party may sell or assign the lease, subject to its terms.

cent, were reported in his income tax returns as gravel royalties and taxed as such by the Commissioner.[4]

In March, 1962, Wood filed amended returns for the years 1958, 1959 and 1960, asserting overpayment of income tax and claiming refunds.[5] Taxpayer's action was based on the theory that the royalty receipts under the lease agreement were actually income from the sale of a capital asset. Taxpayer's claim for refund was disallowed by the Commissioner and this action was subsequently filed. On November 13, 1964, the district court heard the case, sitting without a jury; and on April 23, 1965, the court entered judgment dismissing taxpayer's suit on the merits.

The central question upon which appellant's tax liability must turn is whether he has, by his contractual relation, retained an interest in the minerals which must be classified as an "economic interest." *Palmer v. Bender*, 1933, 287 U. S. 551, 53 S. Ct. 225, 77 L. Ed. 489. The Supreme Court has stated that an economic interest exists where a taxpayer has: "(1) 'acquired by investment, any interest in . . . [the animals] in place,' and (2) secured by legal relationship 'income derived from the extraction of . . . [the mineral], to which he must look for a return of his capital.'" *Commissioner v. Southwest Explor. Co.*, 1956, 350 U. S. 308, 314, 76 S. Ct. 395, 398, 100 L. Ed. 347, ...[6]

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[4] Likewise, these amounts were treated and reported by the lessee as royalty expenses in its corporate income tax returns for its fiscal years ending June 30, 1959, 1960, and 1961 (Prentice and his associates had assigned the lease to Janes-Prentice, Inc., a Texas corporation).

[5] Woods also claims refunds of alleged overpayment of 26 U. S. C., § 6654 (a) penalties and interest for each of the years in question.

[6] This definition of "economic interest" has been faithfully adopted by the Treasury Department. Treas. Reg., § 1.611-1 (b) (1) (1960). The "economic interest" test, of course, has wide

It should be noted that the controlling concept of "economic interest" was enunciated and refined by the Supreme Court in cases involving oil and gas leases. A study of hard mineral cases indicates that its application by other courts has been far from consistent outside of the field of oil and gas, although there would appear to be no apparent justification for a difference in approach depending upon the nature of the mineral involved.[7] In spite of this lack of uniformity of approach, an exhaustive examination of the cases in light of the policies of the relevant portions of the internal revenue laws, leads us to the firm opinion that the proceeds here under consideration were properly taxed as ordinary income.

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application throughout the tax law. Use of that term in this opinion, however, specifically refers to its development and application as the standard by which the issue before this court is to be resolved—i.e., when will proceeds arising out of agreements calling for the exploitation of mineral deposits be considered ordinary income and when will they be taxed as proceeds from the sale of a capital asset.

[7] See e.g., Sneed, *The Economic Interest—An Expanding Concept*, 35 Texas L. Rev. 307 (1957); Zarly, *The "Sale" or "Lease" of Solid Minerals*, P. H. Oil & Gas Taxes, ¶ 1012 (1960); Comment, *Sale or Lease? Disparate Tax Treatment of Mineral Transactions by Courts Based on Nature of Mineral Involved*, 42 Texas L. Rev. 707 (1964). The Treasury Department has expressed the view that the same rule shall apply no matter what the nature of the mineral involved. See Contingent Deferred Payments: *A Study in Contradiction*, 10 Oil & Gas Tax Q. 117, 118 (1961).

Some hard mineral cases reject the applicability of the test as developed in the oil and gas area. See *Barker v. Commissioner*, 2nd Cir. 1957, 250 F. 2d 195; *Charles H. Remer*, 28 T. C. 85, *aff'd* 8th Cir. 1958, 260 F. 2d 337. More prevalent, however, are cases in which a decision has been reached by acknowledging the relevancy of the economic interest test and considering factors such as: the intent of the parties; the language used in the instrument of transaction; the requirement, or likelihood, that all the mineral will be extracted; the presence of initial payments and/or their relative size as compared to payments based upon production; the absence of an affirmative duty to mine; and whether exploitation of the mineral was the primary purpose of the transaction to the landowner. Some of these factors have been considered in Supreme Court cases; others, however have not and would appear immaterial to the proper application of the economic interest test.

I.

The "economic interest" test as developed by the Supreme Court clearly supports the classification of the funds involved here as ordinary income. In *Burnet v. Harmel*, 1932, 287 U. S. 103, 53 S. Ct. 74, 77 L. Ed. 199, the Supreme Court dealt with the precise issue now before this Court, although the contractual agreement there involved dealt with the extraction of oil and gas. The assertion of the taxpayer was the same—that the lease agreement was actually a sale of the minerals in place and that he was therefore entitled to capital gains treatment. This contention was rejected by the Court, which used the case as an opportunity to investigate the policies behind the then relatively new capital gains provisions of the Internal Revenue law. The Court recognized that the purpose behind capital gains treatment is to avoid the hardship of taxing as income in one year the entire gain due to appreciation of value of a capital asset over a considerable period of time.[8] It was noted, however, that "taxation of the receipts of the lessor as income does not ordinarily produce the kind of hardship aimed at by the capital gains provisions of the taxing act."[9] The Court continued by pointing out that the capital gains provision "speaks of a 'sale,' and these leases would not generally be described as a 'sale' of the mineral content of the soil, using the term either in its technical sense or as it is commonly understood."[10]

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[8] *Id.* at 106, 53 S. Ct. at 75, 77 L. Ed. at . . . :

> The Provisions . . . for taxing capital gains at a lower rate . . . were adopted to relieve the taxpayer from these excessive burdens on gains resulting from a conversion of capital investments, and to remove the deterrent effect of those burdens on such conversions.

[9] *Ibid.*

[10] *Id.* at 107, 53 S. Ct. at 75, 77 L. Ed. at . . .

It can thus be stated that Harmel stands for the proposition that an agreement in the nature of a mineral "lease" is not entitled to tax treatment as a sale of capital assets. Yet, Harmel did not set forth any criteria to facilitate a determination of whether a given agreement contains those characteristics which render that decision controlling. The needed standard was supplied by the economic interest test of Palmer v. Bender, 1933, 287 U. S. 551, 53 S. Ct. 225, 77 L. Ed. 487. The issue in Palmer, dissimilar to that in Harmel, was whether a lessee under an oil and gas lease who subsequently conveyed certain of his lease interests to a third party was entitled to depletion on that consideration paid him by the third party. The Court held that he was entitled to depletion since he had retained by his stipulation for royalties with the third party "an economic interest in the oil and gas in place." The provisions of the agreement, the Court held, retained in the original lessee "an economic interest in the oil in place, identical with that of a lessor." This interest was "depleted by production," and this reliance upon production for gain under the agreement was clearly the critical factor in the Court's reasoning.[11]

Subsequent Supreme Court cases have shown that the test for determination of whether proceeds are taxable as capital gains or ordinary income is the same as that for determining whether proceeds are subject to depletion.[12] The standard, first enunciated in Palmer v. Bender, has been clarified but not altered in any significant manner to this date.[13]

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[11] Id. at 557-58, 53 S. Ct. at 227, 77 L. Ed. at .....

[12] See *Burton-Sutton Oil Co. v. Commissioner*, 1946, 328 U. S. 25, 35, 66 S. Ct. 861, 867, ... L. Ed. ..., ... See also, *Anderson v. Helvering*, 1940, 310 U. S. 404, 407-08, 60 S. Ct. 952, 954, ... L. Ed. ..., ..., and cases cited therein.

[13] For a detailed discussion of the history and growth of the "economic interest" test, see *Sneed, supra* note 7. *Burton-Sutton*

A detailed discussion of the subtleties and intricacies of the economic interest test is not necessary to its application in the present case. Clearly, where a "typical" mineral lease is entered into by a landowner, there is a retention of an economic interest in the minerals. In any case, therefore, an inquiry into the presence of such an interest need go no further unless it can be shown that some characteristics of the agreement make it atypical.

The agreement here involved is on its face a typical mineral lease.[14] Yet, the taxpayer bases his claim upon the presence of an allegedly uncommon provision which stipulates royalty payments of a fixed amount per cubic yard of mineral removed, rather than of a certain percentage of market value, sales price, or some similar quantity. Contrary to taxpayer's position, royalty payment measurement, as in the lease under consideration, is anything but uncommon in hard mineral cases. In fact, such a provision appears to be typical.[15] Granted, a

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Oil Co. v. Commissioner, supra note 12, reviews the first sixteen years of the test's history. See also footnote 7 in *Parsons v. Smith*, 1959, 359 U. S. 215, 79 S. Ct. 656, ... L. Ed. 2d ....

[14] Of course, by the use of the term "typical" we do not mean that all, or most, mineral leases are substantially identical. They are not. However, certain characteristics of such agreements are typical in the sense of being quite common. That the present lease is typical may be shown by a comparison of its terms with lease characteristics discussed in 42 Texas Jurisprudence 2d, *Oil and Gas*, §§ 169, 175-77, 184-91, 195, 197-201, 214, 242, 297. See also *Douglas v. Commissioner*, 1944, 322 U. S. 275, 64 S. Ct. 988, ... L. Ed. ..., wherein the Supreme Court dealt with a hard mineral lease substantially identical to the one here under consideration. Clearly, the lease in *Douglas* retained an economic interest in the lessor.

[15] See *e.g., Douglas v. Commissioner, supra* note 14; *United States v. Biwabik Mining Co.*, 1918, 247 U. S. 116, 38 S. Ct. 462, ... L. Ed. ...; *Von Baumbach v. Sargent Land Co.*, 1917, 242 U. S. 503, 37 S. Ct. 210, ... L. Ed. ...; *Maude W. Olinger*, 1956, 27 T. C. 93, 95; Treasury Reg., § 1.612-3 (b) (4) (1960), example (1).

The leases in all of the above cases involving hard minerals called for royalty payments of a fixed amount per unit of minerals removed from the land. The *Sargent Land Co.* and *Biwabik Min-*

royalty determined by quantity removed is foreign to the field of oil and gas leases, the area in which the economic interest test originated. As stated earlier, however, that test is not limited to the oil and gas area and its application to other areas is not to be controlled by the pecularities of oil and gas leases. Under the economic interest test, the critical consideration is whether payment is dependent upon extraction, not the method by which that payment is calculated.[16] Thus, the difference in the

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ing Co. cases are particularly damaging to taxpayer's position. The leases in both cases were strikingly similar to that in the present case. Although the cases were decided before the birth of the economic interest test and were concerned with the application of earlier tax provisions, the issue dealt with in both cases was identical to that at bar—whether the agreements between the parties constituted a sale of the minerals in place. In both cases the Supreme Court held that there was no sale and that the proceeds received under the agreements were income in the same sense as rent. See also *Lynch v. Alworth-Stephens Co.*, 1925, 267 U. S. 364, 45 S. Ct. 274, ... L. Ed. ....

[16] The contention of taxpayer is based largely upon a misreading of the word "production" as used in the economic interest test. Taxpayer would attribute to the phrase "dependent upon production" a requirement of dependency upon the profitability of refinement of the product for commercial use, rather than merely upon removal of the mineral from the leased premises. It is in the latter sense that the Supreme Court has used the term "production," and it should be read as connoting nothing more than extraction for commercial use. This is nowhere expressly stated by the Supreme Court, but a close reading of the cases points to that conclusion. See *Palmer v. Bender, supra; Douglas v. Commissioner, supra* note 14. See also *Bel v. United States.* W. D. La. 1958, 160 F. Supp. 360.

The only Supreme Court case cited by taxpayer containing language possibly contrary to the above proposition is *Paragon Jewel Coal Co. v. Commissioner,* 1965, 380 U. S. 625, 85 S. Ct. 1207, ... L. Ed. 2d .... *Paragon* contains language concerning the effect of per unit compensation upon a determination of the presence of an economic interest. When that language is viewed in context, it is abundantly clear that it lends no support to taxpayer's assertion. *Paragon* involved the question of whether sublessee-contract miners were entitled to percentage depletion allowance upon income received from the lessee. The tax consequences as to the lessor-landowner were in no way involved. Furthermore, the determination of the issue in *Paragon* turned upon whether the contract miners had a capital investment in the mineral—the first

typical measurement of payment under oil and gas and hard mineral leases should not affect the application of the economic interest test.

Taxpayer next argues that, even if the royalty payments are based upon production, the presence of minimum guaranteed royalty provisions in the agreement, requires a finding that his income was not based solely upon production as required by the economic interest test.[17] This contention is without merit as the courts have stated many times that a minimum royalty, such as that present in this case, is merely an advancement for future payments in the form of a guarantee and does not render payment dependent upon a factor other than extraction or production.[18]

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factor of the economic interest test—rather than upon whether the miners looked solely to production for a return on their investment if indeed one existed. After studying all aspects of the contract miners' relation with the lessee, the Court concluded that the miners had no interest in the coal. It is clear from a reading of the opinion that the Court viewed the contract miners as simply "sellers of services"—*i.e.*, the service of mining the coal—and the fact that the compensation for those services was computed as a certain amount per unit mined did not vest in them an economic interest.

[17] *Kirby Petroleum Co. v. Commissioner*, 1946, 326 U. S. 599, 604, 66 S. Ct. 409, 411, 90 L. Ed. 343, . . . :

> Economic interest does not mean title to the oil in place but the possibility of profit from that economic interest dependent solely upon the extraction and sale of the oil.

[18] One need go no farther than *Burnet v. Harmel, supra,* to produce the answer to taxpayer's argument. See also *Freund v. United States,* 7th Cir. 1966, 367 F. 2d 776; *Laudenslager v. Commissioner,* 3rd Cir. 1962, 305 F. 2d 686, 691; *Albritton v. Commissioner,* 5th Cir. 1957, 248 F. 2d 49. The Treasury regulations also provide that advance minimum royalties are subject to depletion—*i.e.*, that they do not mitigate against the presence of an economic interest. Treas. Reg., §§ 1.611-1 (b), 1.612-3 (b) (1960). Nearly all provisions for minimum royalties are similar to that in the instant case in that the minimum payments are in the nature of an advance and are credited against actual royalties as then become due. Such minimum payments are not added compensation separate and apart from the royalty payments. See lease paragraph (4), *supra* note 3.

Taxpayer advances several other arguments in support of his contention that the agreement totally divested him of all economic interest in the minerals under his land. As stated earlier, however, nothing in the agreement persuades us that it varies substantially in regard to the interests of the parties from those which the Supreme Court has held do not give rise to total divestment of economic interest by the landowner.[19]

II.

We now pass to a consideration of the hard mineral cases decided by the courts of appeals. The two most recent decisions that deal with the issue at hand lend strong support to the government's position. In *Rabiner v. Bacon*, 8th Cir. 1967, ... F. 2d ...., the Eighth Circuit dealt with a "Lease Contract" for the removal of sand and gravel. Aside from the fact that it stipulated no minimum royalty and was for a definite period of time, the lease was substantially identical to the one at bar. The payments to the lessor were to be measured by

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[19] Although we do not deem it necessary to develop at length the rationale behind the economic interest test, passing mention of two provisions of the contract at hand is called for by the arguments presented in taxpayer's brief. Paragraph (5) of the agreement [which provides for reduction of royalty payments when "national emergency or calamity" make it impossible for the lessee to "sell materials profitably or in quantities sufficient to meet the minimum royalty guarantee"] clearly demonstrates the dependence of the lessor's interest under the contract upon lessee's exploitation of the minerals. See also the wording of Paragraph (4), *supra* note 3.

In attempting to demonstrate a lack of retained economic interest, taxpayer states that under the contract he cannot compel the lessee to mine any sand and gravel. This in all probability is an incorrect statement of the legal ramifications of the contract. The habendum clause, paragraph (4), is worded in a manner typical of oil and gas leases. The Texas courts have held that such a clause gives rise to an implied covenant to produce. See 42 Tex. Jur. 2d, *Oil & Gas*, § 215 and cases cited therein. See also 2 Summers, Oil and Gas, §§ 291, 306-07 (1959). Logically then, a Texas court would hold that such a covenant is to be read into the contract here under consideration.

a fixed price per unit of mineral removed. The Court, placing primary reliance upon *Burnet v. Harmel* and *Palmer v. Bender*, held that the contract was a lease and not a sale of the minerals in place and that landowner's compensation under the lease was ordinary income. As in the present case, the taxpayer emphasized the presence of a fixed rate of compensation. The court rejected the contention that when so measured, royalty payments cannot be considered as a retained economic interest:

> The method of payment, however, is not dispositive of the question. Regardless of how payments are made, taxpayer's income here was derived solely from the extraction of the mineral and was geared to the production of the mineral. We think it can be safely said that taxpayer retained an economic interest in the subject minerals whether any were mined or not. He had an economic interest in the minerals mined by reason of income he received from the exploitation of his lands and the extraction of the minerals. In this way, he was compensated for the return of his capital by the depletion allowance rather than the capital assets gain provision which results from a sale of capital assets.

Id. at ... (Emphasis added).[20]

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[20] The opinion in *Rabiner* was handed down subsequent to the oral argument in the present case. Taxpayer, in argument to this Court, presented an earlier Eighth Circuit case, *Commissioner v. Remer*, 8th Cir. 1958, 260 F. 2d 337, in support of his position. In *Remer*, the taxpayer purchased two stockpiled iron ore leases. By written agreement he "sold and assigned" the leases to an iron mining company. The compensation under the agreement was a $200,000 down payment to be paid over a three-year period, plus an additional $.10 as each ton of iron ore was shipped from the premises. The court held that the agreement constituted a sale and that taxpayer had not retained an economic interest in the iron ore. Great weight was given to the large down payment and to the wording of the agreement between the parties, and the court considered the down payment as the primary consideration, feel-

The Seventh Circuit has recently dealt with a factual situation even more closely in point. In *Freund v. United States,* 7th Cir. 1966, 367 F. 2d 776, the taxpayer entered into a contract for the removal of sand and gravel from his land. As in *Rabiner,* the contract covered a definite period of time. There was, however, provision for a minimum annual payment and compensation was set at a fixed price per unit of mineral removed. Taxpayer argued that because of the minimum guaranteed payment and the fixed unit price, a sale was effected. The court, however, rejected this reasoning, holding that nothing the case removed it from the general rule of *Burnet v. Harmel.* The court also noted that the agreement was, on its face, a typical mineral lease.

Another case, the logic and holding of which support the conclusion reached by us in the instant case, is *Laudenslager v. Commissioner,* 3rd Cir. 1962, 305 F. 2d 686. In *Laudenslager,* the taxpayer owned land across which a highway was to be built. One of the contractors inquired of taxpayer about the purchase of earth fill for use on the highway. An agreement was reached whereby the contractor could take fill from certain portions of taxpayer's land. Compensation was set at $.05 per cubic yard, and the contractor agreed to take a minimum of 400,000 cubic yards (on the condition that it met highway specifications). The court held, in a well-reasoned opinion, that the payments made to the taxpayer pursuant to this agreement were taxable as ordinary income. This decision was grounded upon an application of the language of the Supreme Court in *Burnet v. Harmel,* discussed in the opening portion of our opinion.

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ing that the act of removal of the stockpiled iron ore was considered by the parties merely as a convenient measurement of additional consideration.

The manner in which *Remer* is distinguished by the court in *Rabiner* clearly demonstrates its inapplicability to our present case.

Taxpayer cites *Linehan v. Commissioner*, 1st Cir. 1961, 297 F. 2d 276, in support of the contention that his contract effected a sale of the minerals in place. In *Linehan* the taxpayer had a small tract of land which was zoned for industrial use only. Pursuant to his desire to develop the land, he entered into a contract with a gravel company whereby the company agreed to excavate all sand and gravel down to a specific grade. The minerals thus removed were to be paid for at a fixed rate per cubic yard and the approximate amount to be removed was determined by a quantity survey. When called upon to determine the tax consequences of this arrangement to the landowner, the court found that a sale of the minerals had been effected. Aside from questioning the reasoning used by the court to reach this conclusion,[21] we also deem *Linehan* clearly distinguishable from the present case on its facts. In *Linehan* the gravel company was obligated to remove all of the sand and gravel down to a specific grade. Furthermore, the primary purpose of the contract, in the taxpayer's mind, was to make the land suitable for industrial use by lowering the grade. It would also appear that the amount of sand and gravel contained in the areas "sold" was approximated in advance of the agreement by means of a survey. Surely these factors are much more compatible with a finding that a "sale" had

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[21] The court stated:

> [I]t is evident that the taxpayer had no "economic interest" in the material taken from his property after its severance, for in every instance he sold sand and gravel for fixed prices per cubic yard without reference to the prices received or the profits, if any, made by the exploiters.

297 F. 2d at 279. In our minds, this reasoning should be questioned on two counts. First, the question is not whether the taxpayer retains an economic interest in the mineral once it has been removed, but rather whether, under the contract, the taxpayer retains an economic interest in the minerals in place. Secondly, as we have shown above, computation of compensation by a fixed price per unit volume removed does not alter application of the economic interest test. See footnote 16 and accompanying text. See also *Samuel L. Green*, 196.., 35 T. C. 1065.

occurred than are the facts of our case.[22] Consequently, we do not consider *Linehan* as persuasive authority for taxpayer's position.

In *Barker v. Commissioner*, 2nd Cir. 1957; 250 F. 2d 195, the Second Circuit dealt with an agreement which was worded as a sale of the sand and gravel in place on taxpayer's land. The contract called for an initial consideration of $10,000, minimum quarterly payments of $3,000, and a fixed price per cubic yard of mineral removed. The court gave strong weight to the wording of the contract and held that it constituted a sale. Emphasis was placed upon the fact that title to the sand and gravel in place passed under the agreement,[23] and the court felt that the "concept of 'retained economic interest' developed in connection with depletion deductions in transactions relating to oil, gas and mineral extraction" was not applicable. This, we feel, for reasons stated earlier, is contrary to the view of the Supreme Court.

Since such reliance is placed upon the wording of the contract as a sale, a factor not present in the case at bar, *Barker* is clearly distinguishable on its facts from our present case. Furthermore, the failure of the court to look to the economic realities of the transaction through application of the economic interest test removes the case from consideration by us as controlling precedent.

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[22] This is not to imply that, presented with the factual situation before the court in *Linehan*, we would reach the same result.

[23] The prevailing view, however, is that concepts of title are not material to the question of economic interest. See *e.g., Kirby Petroleum Co. v. Commissioner*, 1946, 326 U. S. 599, 66 S. Ct. 409, 90 L. Ed. 343; *Palmer v. Bender*, 1933, 287 U. S. 551; 557, 53 S. Ct. 225, 227, 77 L. Ed. 489, . . . ; *Weinert's Estate v. Commissioner*, 5th Cir. 1961, 294 F. 2d 750, 756 and cases cited therein. Illustrative of this principle is the fact that Texas courts have interpreted the typical oil and gas lease as passing a determinable fee title in the mineral estate. 42 Tex. Jur. 2d, *Oil & Gas*, § 177. Yet, such leases do not divest the landowner of all economic interest for purposes of the tax law.

Gowan v. Commissioner, 9th Cir. 1957, 246 F. 2d 448, is also relied upon by taxpayer. This reliance, however, is misplaced. *Gowan* involved an agreement worded in terms of a sale and obligating the "buyer" to remove all sand on taxpayer's land. By subsequent agreement, the payments for the sand removed were secured by a bank note. Viewing these facts, the court found that a sale had been effectuated. Strong emphasis was given to the fact that taxpayer's purpose in entering the contract was to prepare his land for subdivision development, not to exploit the sand deposits. The court further noted that under the agreement the buyer was obligated to remove all of the sand and that the quantity of the sand had been determined "with great accuracy" prior to execution of the agreement. The court also felt that the execution of a bank note as security for the buyer's performance gave the seller a source other than production from which to obtain his compensation under the contract. Viewing all of the above circumstances, the court held that taxpayer had not retained an "economic interest" in the sand. None of the factors which the Ninth Circuit viewed as removing the case from the general rule are present in the instant controversy. Clearly, therefore, what is said in *Gowan* does not weigh against our decision in this case.

United States v. White, 10th Cir. 1962, 311 F. 2d 399, is also relied upon by taxpayer. The court in *White* had to determine the tax treatment to be given a large down payment received by the landowner under an instrument entitled "Mineral Deed." This instrument granted to the vendee thereunder all mineral interests except oil and gas. An initial payment of $175,000 was stipulated, along with future payments of 10% of gross value of all minerals removed. The court had before it only the question of the taxability of the initial $175,000 down payment (which was in no way tied to, or dependent upon, extraction of any mineral). Viewing the language of the instrument and

the size of the initial payment, the court concluded that taxpayer could treat the $175,000 as capital gain. The instrument involved was thus substantially dissimilar from the lease agreement in the instant controversy. Furthermore, the court expressly stated that no implication concerning the taxability of possible future royalty payments under the mineral deed should be drawn from the opinion.

A discussion of applicable Fifth Circuit law must center around *Crowell Land & Mineral Corporation v. Commissioner*, 5th Cir. 1957, 242 F. 2d 864, and *Albritton v. Commissioner*, 5th Cir. 1957, 248 F. 2d 49. Taxpayer argues strenuously that *Crowell* is controlling, while the government points to the holding in *Albritton*.

The question before the court in *Crowell* was the same as now under consideration. The taxpayer had entered into an agreement for the removal of sand and gravel from its land. The agreement was denominated a "Contract of Sale" and the parties were referred to throughout as vendor and vendee. The contract called for minimum payments each year, together with future payments measured by a fixed price per unit of sand and gravel removed.

The discussion of the law in *Crowell* is not lengthy and no doubt much of the court's reasoning is not apparent from the opinion. It would appear, however, that strong emphasis was placed upon the wording of the instrument as a contract of sale. The court reasoned that the instrument unambiguously revealed the true intent of the parties and that such intent was determinative of the issue before the court.[24]

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[24] 242 F. 2d at 866:

> A bonafide sale was the intent of the parties and it was expressed in terms free from ambiguity throughout the instrument in the provisions and conditions it set out. Looking to the actual circumstances as well as the language of the contract of sale, there is no occasion or basis for resorting to legal niceties of interpretation to defeat the basic purpose and effect of the transaction.

The same issue was again before the court a few months later in *Albritton*. In that case, the taxpayer executed an agreement "completely embodying the language of a typical lease."[25] The lease was of indefinite duration and provided for minimum monthly royalties. Royalty payments were to be measured by a fixed percentage of the retail sales value of the sand and gravel removed. As in *Crowell*, the court did not discuss the applicable law in detail, but merely stated that it was clear, under the Supreme Court cases developing and applying the economic interest test, that such an interest had been retained by the taxpayer. In so concluding, the court rejected taxpayers' contention that *Crowell* controlled.

Viewing our present factual situation in the light of *Crowell* and *Albritton*, we consider the latter to be the more applicable precedent. The lease in *Albritton* differed from that now under consideration in only one relevant regard—the method of measuring the royalty payments. We have shown, however, that this factual distinction is not to be viewed as compelling a different legal result.[26]

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[25] 248 F. 2d at 51.

[26] If indeed the method of determining royalties was the sole basis for the refusal of the court in *Albritton* to follow *Crowell*, we conclude that such distinction is not supported by a reasonable reading of the Supreme Court decisions. We feel, however, that this difference in the method of royalty computation was *not* the distinguishing factor in the two decisions. As far as can be discerned from a reading of the opinions, the wording of the respective contracts was the primary factor causing the different results. Clearly then, *Crowell* would have no application in the present case, while *Albritton* would clearly be in point. We must state, however, that if the two cases were decided differently solely because of the wording of the agreements, we do not view such distinction as properly determinative of tax consequences under the economic interest test. See *e.g.*, *Commissioner v. P. G. Lake, Inc.*, 1958, 356 U. S. 260, 266-67, 78 S. Ct. 691, 695, ... L. Ed. 2d ..., ...; *Hamme v. Commissioner*, 4th Cir. 1953, 209 F. 2d 29, 32. See also *United States v. Witte*, 5th Cir. 1962, 306 F. 2d 81.

It should be noted that each court of appeals decision relied upon by taxpayer involved factors not present in the instant case. In each case, these factors, here missing, were critical to the court's decison to allow capital gains treatment. In *Linehan v. Commissioner* and *Gowan v. Commissioner* the courts were influenced by the fact that preparation of the land for another use, not extraction of the minerals, was the primary motive of the land-owners' action in entering into the contracts covering the minerals. The courts in the same two cases were influenced by a requirement in the respective agreements that all of the minerals covered by the contracts be removed.[27] In *United States v. White,* the court felt that a large down payment in no way tied to extraction was indicative of a sale. In *Barker v. Commissioner, Gowan v. Cimmissioner, United States v. White,* and *Crowell Land & Mineral Co. v. Commissioner,* the deciding courts were strongly influenced by the fact that the respective agreements were couched in terms of absolute conveyances or contracts of sale.[28]

The decision of the district court in this case is clearly supported by the rationale of the applicable Supreme Court cases and is in accord with our view of the letter and spirit of the relevant tax provisions. Furthermore, as no case in this or any other circuit persuades us toward a different interpretation of the law, we accordingly Affirm.

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[27] The Tax Court has also viewed a requirement that all sand and gravel be removed as indicative of a sale. *Robert H. Dann,* 1958, 30 T. C. 499.

[28] Whether or not any or all of these factors should be material under the economic interest test we do not here decide. An awareness of their influence in prior cases and their absence upon the facts of the present case, however, serve to illustrate the strength of the government's position.

Certificate of Service.

It is hereby certified that service of this Petition for Writ of Certiorari has been made on the adverse party by mailing a copy thereof on this 4th day of August, 1967, in an envelope, with air mail postage prepaid, to:

(1) Solicitor General
Department of Justice
Washington 25, D. C.

(2) Lee A. Jackson,
Melva N. Graney,
Crombie J. D. Garrett,
Attorneys
Department of Justice
Washington, D. C. 20530;

And, by air mailing a copy thereof this 4th day of August, 1967, in an envelope with postage prepaid, properly addressed to him as follows:

Floyd M. Buford
United States Attorney
The Federal Building
Macon, Georgia;

all in accordance with Rule 21 (1) and Rule 33 of the United States Supreme Court.

.....

J. René Hawkins,
Attorney for Petitioners.

In the Supreme Court of the United States

OCTOBER TERM, 1967

No. 471

T. B. PEELER AND MRS. T. B. PEELER, PETITIONERS

v.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

ON PETITION FOR A WRIT OF CERTIORARI TO THE UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS FOR THE FIFTH CIRCUIT

MEMORANDUM FOR THE UNITED STATES IN OPPOSITION

The question in this case is whether payments petitioner [1] received for the right to mine and remove minerals on his land were capital gain, as he claimed, or depletable ordinary income, as the court below held.

Petitioner executed a "lease" that entitled the "lessee" to remove stone and sand from petitioner's land for an indefinite period, in consideration of a "royalty" of 3 cents per ton of stone removed and 2 cents per ton of sand removed, with a minimum annual payment of $800 guaranteed. The contract empowered the "lessee" to cease operations and terminate

[1] Petitioner refers to Mr. T. B. Peeler, who was the only active party in the transactions involved. His wife is a party solely because joint returns were filed.

279-625—67——1

the arrangement at any time. (R. 8–12).[2] The Commissioner's determined that these amounts be treated as depletable ordinary income. Petitioner paid the resulting deficiency and sued for a refund. The District Court sustained petitioner's contention that he was entitled to capital gains treatment of the "royalty" payments. The court of appeals reversed, holding that the payments were ordinary income subject to the depletion allowance.[3] This decision is sound and further review is not warranted.

1. Petitioner errs in his assertion (Pet. 8–9) that this Court has never determined whether cases, such as this one, that involve hard minerals, are to be governed by the same rules that this Court has developed for determining whether landowners receive ordinary or capital income in oil and gas transactions. In *Bankers Coal Co.* v. *Burnet,* 287 U.S. 308, as in the case at bar, the taxpayer had transferred operating rights in hard minerals—coal deposits—in consideration of per ton "royalty" with a minimum annual payment guaranteed. The taxpayer contended that the "royalty" payments were capital gain from a sale. This Court rejected the contention and, relying upon *Burnet* v. *Harmel,* 287 U.S. 103, a case involving oil and gas royalties, said (287 U.S. at 311):

> The considerations which led to the conclusion that bonus and royalties paid to the lessor of

[2] R. refers to the printed record in the court of appeals.

[3] The court of appeals held that this case was controlled by its decision in *Wood* v. *United States,* 377 F. 2d 300, which is also pending before this Court on petition for a writ of certiorari, No. 475, this Term. See also *Royalton Stone Corp.* v. *Commissioner,* 379 F. 2d 298 (C.A. 2), petition for certiorari pending, No. 604, this Term.

> Texas oil lands are taxable income and not a conversion of capital, as upon a sale of capital assets, are equally applicable to West Virginia coal leases, whether the title to the coal in place passes to the lessee at the date of the lease, or only upon severance by the lessee.

See also *Palmer* v. *Bender,* 287 U.S. 551, 558, and *Douglas* v. *Commissioner,* 322 U.S. 275, 280.

In these and related cases, this Court has uniformly ruled that a transfer of operating rights in minerals in consideration of payments dependent upon extraction is not a capital transaction. In the language of *Palmer* v. *Bender, supra,* the transferor in such situations does not receive capital gains if he has retained his "economic interest" in the minerals in place. Referring to the statutory provisions for depletion, the Court said (p. 557):

> The language of the statute is broad enough to provide, at least, for every case in which the taxpayer has acquired, by investment, any interest in the oil in place, and secures, by any form of legal relationship, income derived from the extraction of the oil, to which he must look for a return of his capital.

In sum, this Court has made clear that a transfer of operating rights does not terminate the transferor's "economic interest" in the minerals in place if the transferor continues to depend solely upon the extraction of the minerals for a return of his capital investment. *Commissioner* v. *Southwest Expl. Co.,* 350 U.S. 308, 314. The required dependence may take a variety of forms. Thus the decisions have found the requisite interest present when the transferor's inter-

est is payable in cash rather than kind, *Helvering* v. *Twin Bell Syndicate,* 293 U.S. 312, or represents a percentage of the gross revenue, *Burnet* v. *Harmel, supra; Palmer* v. *Bender, supra,* or of the net profits, *Kirby Petroleum Co.* v. *Commissioner,* 326 U.S. 599; *Burton-Sutton Oil Co.* v. *Commisisoner,* 328 U.S. 25. It is equally clear that the transferor receives depletable ordinary income, rather than capital gains, when, as in the present case, his receipts are a fixed amount per ton of minerals removed. *Bankers Coal Co.* v. *Burnet, supra;* see *Douglas* v. *Commissioner, supra.*

Accordingly, the Court of Appeals properly ruled that the royalty measured by quantity of stone and sand removed was depletable ordinary income to petitioner. Recent appellate decisions in four other circuits are squarely in accord. See *Royalton Stone Corp* v. *Commissioner, supra; Laudenslager* v. *Commissioner,* 305 F. 2d 686 (C.A. 3), certiorari denied, 371 U.S. 947; *Schreiber* v. *United States,* (C.A. 7), decided July 17, 1967 (20 A.F.T.R. 2d 5126); *Freund* v. *United States,* 367 F. 2d 776 (C.A. 7); *Rabiner* v. *Bacon,* 373 F. 2d 537 (C.A. 8).

2. Petitioner asserts (Pet. 6–8) in support of his petition for certiorari a conflict with the decision of the First Circuit in *Linehan* v. *Commissioner,* 297 F. 2d 276. Although the reasoning in *Linehan* is opposed to that of the Fifth Circuit in *Wood* v. *Commissioner, supra,* on which the decision in the present case is based, any resulting conflict does not warrant review of this case in this Court.

The facts of *Linehan* differ from those of this case, *Wood,* and the other cases cited above. *Linehan* involved a taxpayer who owned a piece of land of raised elevation, which he wanted excavated to a lower level. The First Circuit was apparently of the view that the substance of the agreement was that the grantee of the right to remove sand and gravel from the property was expected to excavate the property down to a level of approximately 125 feet above sea level and pay the grantor a fixed amount for each cubic yard of sand and gravel removed.[4]

In determining that the grantor's receipts were capital gains, the First Circuit relied on the statement in this Court's opinion in *Kirby Petroleum* v. *Commissioner,* 326 U.S. 599, 604 that:

> Economic interest does not mean title to the oil in place but the possibility of profit from that economic interest dependent solely on the extraction and sale of the oil.

Apparently relying on this Court's use of the phrase "and sale," the First Circuit concluded that a grantor does not receive ordinary income unless he retains a right to part of the proceeds the grantee receives for the material "after its severance," 297 F. 2d at 279. The First Circuit then concluded that because Linehan's compensation was a fixed amount per cubic yard, and had no dependence on the sale price to the

[4] The Tax Court found, and stressed throughout its opinion in *Linehan*, that the grantee was not under an obligation to remove or pay for any particular amount of sand and gravel. See 35 T.C. at 533. The First Circuit, however, made no reference to this point.

grantee, the proceeds were capital rather than ordinary.

To the extent that *Linehan* rests on the grantor's receipt of a fixed price per cubic yard it is in conflict with the decision here. But, also to that extent, the decision in *Linehan* is clearly wrong. This Court said in *Kirby Petroleum* (326 U.S. at 603):

> The test of the right to depletion is whether the taxpayer has a capital investment in the oil in place which is necessarily reduced as the oil is extracted. See *Anderson* v. *Helvering,* 310 U.S. 404, 407.

Thus, a correct analysis must be based on the grantor's interest in the mineral "in place", and not, as the First Circuit said, on the grantor's interest after severance. The issue in *Kirby Petroleum* was, moreover, whether an interest in net profits gave the grantor a right to depletion. This Court held that an interest in the net sale proceeds was a sufficient requisite to depletion, but did not hold that an interest in post-severance proceeds was a necessary element of the allowance of depletion. Were this not the correct reading, and if *Kirby* indeed supported the first Circuit's result in *Linehan,* serious questions would arise as to the continuing validity of this Court's decision in *Bankers Coal Co.* v. *Burnet, supra,* where the grantor's receipts—held to be depletable—were, as here, a per ton royalty with a guaranteed minimum annual payment. See also *Douglas* v. *Commissioner, supra.*

No court of appeals has since applied the *Linehan* rationale in any case. The Fifth Circuit in *Wood,* the Third Circuit in *Laudenslager,* and the Eighth Circuit

in *Rabiner,* has each expressly rejected the *Linehan* rationale; and in *Royalton Stone* the Second Circuit made no mention of *Linehan* in ruling against taxpayers who had expressly relied upon the case.

In addition, two decisions from other circuits on which the First Circuit relied in *Linehan, Crowell Land & Min. Corp.* v. *Commissioner,* 242 F. 2d 864 (C.A. 5), and *Barker* v. *Commissioner,* 250 F. 2d 195 (C.A. 2), have since been severely restricted in their respective jurisdictions. In *Wood* v. *Commissioner, supra,* the Fifth Circuit expressly disapproved *Crowell* to the extent that it granted capital treatment for the reason that the grantor's proceeds were based on a fixed per ton royalty. Pet. 39, n. 26; see also the instant case, Pet. 19–20, n. 2. In *Royalton Stone* v. *Commissioner, supra,* the Second Circuit restricted *Barker* to its particular facts—where the grantee agrees to pay a fixed price over a fixed period without regard to the quantity of minerals extracted.[5]

Thus the First Circuit decision in *Linehan* now clearly stands alone among appellate decisions, both in reasoning and result. The unique facts of the case by no means suggest that the First Circuit would find *Linehan* controlling in a case, such as the present one, where the agreement makes the grantor a participant in a mining venture. It could well occur that even on the precise facts of *Linehan,* the First

[5] *Gowans* v. *Commissioner,* 246 F. 2d 448 (C.A. 9), which petitioner claims to be in conflict with the Fifth Circuit's decision here and in *Wood* (Pet. 8), is a case like *Barker* where there was an obligation to pay a fixed amount and build specified facilities, regardless of the amount of minerals extracted.

Circuit would not today reach the same result. For these reasons, we submit that the difference in reasoning between this case and *Linehan* is not the sort of conflict that warrants a grant of certiorari.

3. There is nothing to petitioner's contention (Pet. 9–10) that the courts of appeals have created confusion in determining the tax treatment of a transferor's interest in hard minerals. Relying on *Hodges* v. *Georgia Kaolin Co.*, 108 Ga. App. 115, 132 S.E. 2d 86, petitioner apparently intends to reassert his argument below (see Pet. 19–20, n. 2) that Georgia law required his grantee to remove all the mineral on his property. But, as the court below recognized, *Hodges* holds only that a grantee who has removed overburden cannot stop there but must make a reasonable effort to launch profitable mining operations; it does not remotely suggest an implied obligation to mine to exhaustion.

Even if the operating company here had undertaken an obligation to remove and pay for all minerals in place, there would not have been a capital transaction. In *Burnet* v. *Harmel, supra,* this Court said (287 U.S. at p. 106):

> It is an incident of every oil and gas lease, where production operations are carried on by the lessee, that the ownership of the oil and gas passes from the lessor to the lessee at some time and the lessor is compensated by the payments made by the lessee for the rights and privileges which he acquires under the lease. But notwithstanding this incidental transfer of ownership, it is evident that the taxation of the receipts of the lessor as income does not ordinarily produce

> the kind of hardship aimed at by the capital gains provision of the taxing act. Oil and gas may or may not be present in the leased premises, and may or may not be found by the lessee. If found, their abstraction from the soil is a time-consuming operation and the payments made by the lessee to the lessor do not normally become payable as the result of a single transaction within the taxable year, as in the case of a sale of property.

This reasoning applies to every kind of mineral in place and every form of transfer of operating rights, so long as the grantor's consideration for the transfer is solely dependent upon extraction. The transfer in the present case falls well within that category. Further, by petitioner's own account (Pet. 5), it will take 150 years to mine the deposit involved to exhaustion, and for petitioner and his heirs to receive the "royalties" that are the return of their capital.

The petition for a writ of certiorari should be denied.

Respectfully submitted.

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